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OCT 18 1917

PUEBLO INDIANS

Synopsis of Film

1. The Pueblo Indians of Isleta, New Mexico.
2. Indian Dwellings on the High Tablelands or "Mesas."
3. The Aged Chief of the Tribe and his Great Grandson.
4. Pueblo Women in Native Dress.
5. A Young Indian Girl.
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7. Bread Ovens Made of Clay.
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THE PUEBLO INDIANS

NOWHERE in the world is better illustrated the adaptation of primitive man to the geographical conditions surrounding his home than in that vast semiarid region which includes the states of Arizona and New Mexico. Here for centuries preceding the coming of the white man the natives had developed a simple civilization which included the principles of democracy and town government, the need and methods of irrigation and intensive cultivation of the soil, the weaving of cotton, the making of pottery and the building of permanent houses. Here grew up peace-loving, industrious, home-making tribes and clans of Indians, differing slightly from one another in habits and manners and in religious customs and beliefs, but all belonging to the same parent stock. They are known to us as the Pueblo Indians, a name taken from the Spanish word "pueblo" which means "town."

These Indians, unlike the fierce, half-nomadic people who dwelt in the rest of the territory now known as the United States, were strangers to war and bloodshed and lived in communities built for protection against their savage neighbors, usually upon high tablelands or "mesas," hundreds of which dot the vast plains of the southwest. They were an agricultural people, producing from the sandy soil crops of corn, squashes, melons and peaches. Their labor was especially difficult and discouraging since these products were perpetually subject to the forays of their robber neighbors, the Navajos, the Comanches and the Utes. For better protection, they were forced to make their homes upon the tops of these almost inaccessible mesas, building the many terraced dwellings which we see pictured in the film.

Here the Spaniard, in search of El Dorado, found them and finally subjugated them. At the time of the Mexican

war, this territory and its people came under the control of the United States government, which gave them rights of citizenship and respected their title to the land.

In spite of the fact that many early explorers, misled by the number and size of the ruined and abandoned dwellings, estimated that at one time these Indians numbered more than 250,000, it is probable that their number never exceeded 30,000. Many of their homes were deserted for many reasons, the chief of which were the increasing activity of their plundering neighbors, the exhaustion of the soil, lack of water and disastrous wind and rainstorms which carried away their crops. As the people were forced to seek new quarters, they left their old homes and started new ones where conditions seemed better both for safety and for agriculture.

These people differ greatly from the Indians of the eastern forests and from those of the western plains, not only in appearance but also in manner of life. The difference is especially conspicuous in their small stature, their gentle manners, and their industrious habits.

Their religion is based upon their constant need of water. All their ceremonies are held with the idea of obtaining from the gods an amount of rain sufficient to ensure their crops. These rites are observed at the planting and the harvesting of the crops, and usually take the form of stately and dignified dances. The most famous of these is the Snake Dance of the Moki* Indians. For days the desert around their pueblos is searched for snakes. Many varieties, including the deadly rattlesnake, are captured and kept for the occasion. The priests, with elaborate ceremonies, invoke the rain gods through these messengers. At the end of the dance, the snakes are set free to bring the prayer of the people to the notice of the all-powerful gods.

The home life of these people is beautiful and happy.

The women build their dwellings and own them. As the daughters of a household grow up and marry, the parents' home is usually enlarged by the building of a wing, or in case there is no ground room, by the addition of another story. The men do the weaving and care for the crops, while the women carry the water from the springs, prepare the meals, train the children, and do whatever building or repairing is necessary about the house. The houses are built of stones taken from the bottom of the cliffs which form the sides of the mesa. These stones are usually in the form of slabs which have been broken off by the action of rain and frost and lie ready for use. The men usually help when the moving of stones becomes too difficult for the women of the household.

Contact with the white man has had less apparent effect upon the Moki Indians than upon the other American tribes. They still cling to their old gods and their ancient religion, however much they appear to have been impressed by Christianity. Their home life and their occupations are nearly the same as when the Spaniard first saw them in the sixteenth century. Their love for home, wife, children and people, their gentle manners and moral life are praiseworthy characteristics from which our modern civilization has much to learn.

*(The Hopi, or the "Good People," was their own name for themselves but the Navajos, their neighbors, in derision called them the Moki, or the "Dead People." The name "Moki" no longer conveys an insult and the government has called their reservation the Moki (Moqui) Indian Reservation.)

Questions, Topics, Suggestions

1. Look at the map of Arizona and New Mexico for ruined and inhabited pueblos.

2. What difference do you note between the Pueblo Indians and other tribes?

3. How did the eastern Indians and those of the plain live?

4. Describe the effects of geographical position upon the Esquimaux, the Swiss, the Moki.

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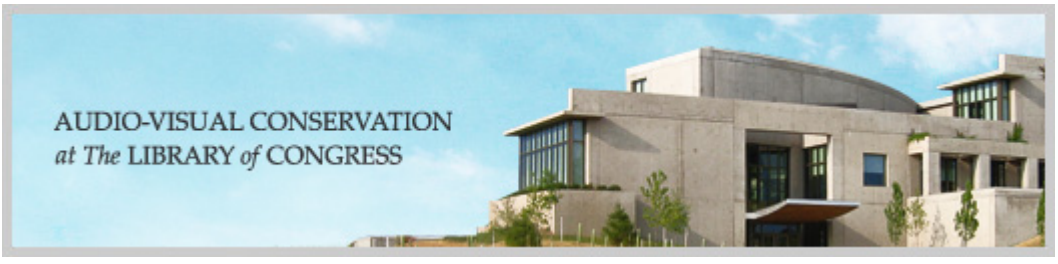

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